Somaliland

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The world's most prolific de facto state has been grappling with what might turn out to be a major setback in its journey towards internationally recognized statehood. In late 2022 violent government crack downs on protests against the killing of an oppositional politician sparked an uprising in its eastern regions. Fighters soon managed to expel the Somaliland military and established a government of their own. This government was subsequently recognized as a regional state government by Somalia. Somaliland, in its quest to establish a state encompassing its old colonial borders, is facing off against an old threat to de facto states: tribalism.

Somalia has long been plagued with instability, in part due to clans being its predominant socio-political unit with the corresponding eruptive polit-

ical landscape making nation building especially hard. Somaliland broke away from Somalia in 1991 and, while not being recognized internationally, had been lauded for overcoming this major obstacle and creating a functioning independent government with broadly free and fair elections, their own currency, military and comparatively low levels of violence, de facto a state. Nevertheless, grievances permeated in the eastern regions around the city of Las Anod and amongst members of the Dhulbahante clan who grew frustrated at the domination of Somaliland by the Isaaq clan.

Their differences go back to colonial times when the Isaaq clan worked with the British while the Dhulbahante opposed the protectorate. After gaining independence from the British Somaliland joined the state of Somalia, previously an Italian colony, however conflicts over and with the centralized power in the south soon ensued. During the 1980s these conflicts turned violent and resulted in Somaliland's separation from Somalia being achieved in the 1990s. Not wishing to continue as part of the old colonial construct of Somaliland, the Dhulbahante dominated regions joined the highly autonomous Somali regional state of Puntland in the Northeast of the country. They were taken over by Somaliland again in 2007 when Puntland withdrew it forces from the region. Subsequent Somaliland suppression of Dhulbahante opposition built up into conflict today. Peace negotiations under the new Somaliland president Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi have thus far resulted neither in a halt to the violence nor to the construction of another state-like entity centered around the Dhulbahante clan in the formerly eastern regions of Somaliland.

The displacement and the dead caused by the conflict are a tragedy which dilutes Somaliland's institutional posterchild status both in the Horn of Africa and especially in war torn Somalia as well as constituting internal division thus taking away their good image internationally. Moreover, the instability and chaos brought about by the conflict might enable Al-Shabab to expand its operations north, ending the relative security Somaliland citizens enjoyed and putting further stress on their state structures. These additions to the predominant obstacle Somaliland faces, the fact that the international community fears encouraging other secessionist movements especially but not exclusively in Africa, may only make it harder to reach international recognition.